



SHARP News



Unplanned Pregnancy Impacts US & US Navy

In spite of this era of technology, information, and an expanding range of contraceptive choices, **over half of all pregnancies in the US are unintended. Although unplanned pregnancy rates have dropped since 1997, the rate is much higher than those seen in any other developed nation.** Unplanned pregnancy in the US is serious and costly. The costs can be measured in many social aspects such as reduced educational attainment and employment opportunity for the mother. With unintended pregnancy, there is increased likelihood of child abuse and neglect. There is also increased likelihood of infant and maternal illness and an increased likelihood of abortion. For teenagers, these problems are compounded. They are less likely than their non-pregnant peers to get or stay married, less likely to complete high school or college, and more likely to live in poverty. The US Department of Health and Human Service Healthy People 2010 conference has drafted a number of goals for decreasing the impact unintended pregnancy in the US. For example, one proposed goal seeks to increase the proportion of pregnancies that are intended to 70%.

In the US Navy and USMC, unplanned pregnancy rates parallel civilian rates for age cohorts. A 1996 study found that 65% of pregnancies among enlisted women were unplanned. In 1999, a similar survey of Navy enlisted women saw some improvement, with 60% of pregnancies unplanned. **Half of the women who had an unplanned pregnancy had not used any form of birth control to prevent it.** The study also found that the pill was the most failure-prone method of birth control (as is true in the general population). Unplanned pregnancy impacts Sailors and commands in many ways. The financial and contingency child-care challenges of single parenthood for Sailors, male and female, can be significant. Pregnant Sailors aboard ships can be difficult to manage because of the need to protect the health and careers of service women without degrading the mission of the command. Though Navy policy permits pregnant members to remain on board until the 20th week of gestation, the Navy studies found that many (but less than half) are transferred early, leaving the command short-handed until a replacement arrives.

Much can be done to improve rates of pregnancies that are intended. For example, male and female Sailors and Marines can be given more education on required behaviors to ensure efficacy of their chosen method of contraception. Advantages and side-effects of various birth control methods could also be discussed, as could emergency contraception. One of the findings of the 1996 Navy survey which suggests a need for increased education of Sailors on this issue is this: enlisted women who had an unplanned pregnancy in FY96 who did **not** use birth control gave these as their reasons:

Rhythm Method or Withdrawal works well enough	29%
I am not sexually active	24%
I (or my partner) have been sterilized	5%
I (or my partner) am not fertile	2%
My religious/personal beliefs do not permit use of birth control	2%
Other reason	38%

Your Sexual Health is a scripted Powerpoint lecture developed by SHARP for 1-hour all-hands presentations. It includes a discussion of **unplanned pregnancy and contraceptive choices**. It also covers the important message **that most contraceptives do not prevent sexually transmitted disease**. This presentation can be downloaded from the SHARP webpage, and it can be run from the SHARP Toolbox 2000 compact disk.

Sources:

- Pregnancy and Single Parenthood in the Navy: Results of a 1997 Survey, TR-98-6, Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, Sep 1998
- Parenthood and Pregnancy: Results of a 1999 Survey, Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, Dec 1999
- Healthy People 2010-Conference Edition, 9 Family Planning, Nov 30, 1999